**Spanish Moss, Lichens & Slime Molds**

**Spanish Moss**  
Spanish moss (*Tillandsia usneoides*) is one of the most misunderstood plants found throughout the Deep South. To native South Carolinians, these gray strands draping from the branches of live oaks and other trees are a natural part of the scenery, while many newcomers fear that it may be killing their trees.

Contrary to popular belief, Spanish moss causes little to no detrimental effect on a host tree. It may appear to have roots growing within the host tree, but it is an epiphyte. Epiphytes grow on other plants without taking any water or nutrients from them, and use the host plant for support and protection.

Spanish moss can be seen hanging from many different types of hosts, including pecans, oaks, pines, and even telephone lines. Spanish moss is most evident in trees that are declining due to some other reason. Heavy infestations can lead to further decline by shading out the lower leaves of the tree. It is far too often that homeowners waste a lot of time and energy trying to remove it from their trees, since it is actually causing no harm.

**Treatment:** Spanish moss is too often blamed for problems that are caused by other reasons. Increasing tree vigor by proper watering and fertilization is one way to restrict the growth of Spanish moss. There are no chemical treatments available for its control. This small native plant should be appreciated as a part of South Carolina's natural heritage and not blamed as the cause of other plants' problems.

**Lichens**  
A lichen is an unusual plant composed of a fungus, an alga, and quite commonly, a yeast that live together in the same body. Lichens often appear as green to gray-green leafy or crusty growths on the trunks or branches of plants. They are not harmful to the plant, and are merely using the plant as a place to anchor.

Typically, they occur in abundance on plants that are declining in health or vigor. They are in no way
responsible for the poor health of the plant. Less vigorous plants tend to be more open, increasing sunlight penetration and subsequent lichen growth.

**Treatment:** Controls are not necessary, since lichens are not harming the plant. Lichens will gradually disappear if plant health is restored. Remember they will probably reappear if you do not correct the true cause of the plant's decline.

**Slime Molds**

Slime molds are fungus-like organisms (**Myxomycetes**) and live in cool, shady damp places such as the soil surface of lawns, on organic mulches, or on rotting logs. Slime molds feed on decaying organic matter, bacteria and fungi in the soil. They do not feed on green plants. Because slime molds grow on dead organic matter, they do not pose a direct threat to any plants in the garden.

Slime molds come in a variety of colors, including brown, salmon, off-white, yellow, orange or brick red. Some appear in the spring and look like white-yellow globs of plaster on mulch in landscape beds, such as the dog vomit slime mold (**Fuligo septica**). These occur mostly during the spring during warm, wet conditions and may appear in the same location each year.

Although they may look alarming, slime molds generally pose no harm to lawn grasses. However, prolonged and excessive shading may cause a temporary yellowing of turfgrass blades. A very heavy covering of slime mold may temporarily make an undesirable appearance in the lawn.

In lawns, slime molds produce white, gray or purple patches in the lawn that are usually visible in the morning. They are especially noticeable later in their life cycle when they form grayish or black crust-like powdery balls on blades of grass.

This information is supplied with the understanding that no discrimination is intended and no endorsement by the Clemson University Cooperative Extension Service is implied. All recommendations are for South Carolina conditions and may not apply to other areas. Use pesticides only according to the directions on the label. All recommendations for pesticide use are for South Carolina only and were legal at the time of publication, but the status of registration and use patterns are subject to change by action of state and federal regulatory agencies. Follow all directions, precautions and restrictions that are listed.